

To: Committee on Appropriations, State of Connecticut General Assembly
From: Jill Vergara, Fairfield RTM, District 7
Date: March 23, 2022
Re: Bill No. 403, "An Act Reestablishing Funding for the Homeowners' Elderly and Disabled Circuit Breaker Tax Relief Program"

To the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jill Vergara. I am a representative on Fairfield's RTM and have served on that body for seven years. I am also a current and past Chair of the RTM's Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee, and in that capacity, have worked with our town's Tax Assessor in reviewing our local relief programs as well as the State's circuit breaker program (renamed HEART, or Help Elderly Against Rising Taxes).

I have seen firsthand how our seniors and disabled homeowners desperately need these relief programs. Tax relief programs--both state and local--have helped countless seniors and disabled homeowners in Fairfield to stay here in town when they otherwise would not have been able to.

I strongly support the revisions in Bill No. 403 that would ensure state funding of its elderly and disabled relief programs (Section 1, subsection (g)). The failure to fund this program has pushed the cost to the towns, which have very limited means to raise revenue. Towns primarily use property tax to raise revenue, and because property tax is applied flatly to all residents, it is incredibly regressive and negatively impacts homeowners with lower incomes in a magnified way. Having towns pay for tax relief meant to ease tax burdens for homeowners through property tax makes no sense: funding through property tax adds to the tax burden that we are trying to alleviate.

Restoring state funding fixes this problem.

Last year, Fairfield had 622 participants in the State's circuit breaker program, which resulted in \$367,118 of revenue loss. Over the past five years in which the State has failed to reimburse the town for its program, Fairfield has absorbed a total of \$1.88 million in revenue loss. Much of this cost is passed directly to those homeowners who most need relief.

I worry about lowering the qualifying income to participate in the state's relief program (Section 1, subsection (c)(1)). While I agree with adding an automatic mechanism for qualifying incomes to increase according to the national consumer price index (subsection (c)(2)), I do not support lowering eligible income levels approximately \$15,000 for each category. The current income levels of \$38,100 for single homeowners and \$46,400 for married homeowners seem appropriate for our current economic circumstances and cost of living.

Thank you so much for your service and for considering this very important and worthy legislation.

Sincerely,
Jill Vergara
Representative, Fairfield RTM District 7
Chair, RTM Senior & Disabled Tax Relief Committee